Alternate Systems of Education - Formal and Non-Formal Education

Module Details

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<tr>
<td>5. Principal Investigator</td>
<td>Prof. Vandana Chakrabarti, Director, Lifelong Learning and Extension, SNDT Women’s University, Mumbai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Paper Coordinator</td>
<td>Prof. Vandana Chakrabarti, Director, Lifelong Learning and Extension, SNDT Women’s University, Mumbai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Content writer</td>
<td>Dr. Asha Patil, Associate Professor, Department of Continuing and Adult Education &amp; Extension Work SNDT Women’s University,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Content Reviewer</td>
<td>Prof. Rajesh, Department of Adult Continuing Education &amp; Extension Work, University of Delhi</td>
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1. Learning Objectives:

At the end of this module the learner will be able to:

- Define formal and non-formal education
- Distinguish between formal and non-formal education
- State characteristics of non-formal education
- Explain need for alternate modes of education

2. Introduction

Education is a continuous process. One can learn from nature and surroundings, from parents and siblings, from neighbours and relatives. In other words, our informal education starts from birth within the family. Learning happens and no one has a particular intention of either teaching or learning. We learn through observations and imitation. Now a day due to explosion of technology/media, one can also learn from various electronic media such as television, radio, mobile, films, etc. This type of learning is known as informal education. Education is a long term investment in human capital. It helps the growth and development of an individual as well as the nation.

When we talk about types of education, we usually categorise education in three categories namely informal education, formal education and non-formal education. All of us are familiar about formal education as most of us have studied in formal education system at some point of life. Some of us might have learnt through non-formal education system as well. All of us learn something or other by the informal way.

In educational literature, the study of alternative education systems often mentions “open systems”, “non-formal education”, “distance learning”, “non-conventional studies”, among other terms. Some time they are used synonymy. In this module we will analyze the concepts of formal, non-formal and informal education, their features/characteristics, and difference between formal and non-formal education, advantages, limitations and inter-relations.

3. Definitions

Coombs (1973) has defined typology of educational programmes as follows:

**Informal Education:** ‘The truly lifelong process whereby every individual acquires attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from daily experience and the educative influences and resources in his or her environment—from family and neighbours, from work and play, from the marketplace, the library and the mass media.’

**Formal Education:** ‘The hierarchically structured, chronologically graded “educational system”, running from primary school through the university and including, in addition to general academic studies, a variety of specialized programmes and institutions for full-time technical and professional training.’

**Non-Formal Education:** ‘Any organized educational activity outside the established formal system—whether operating separately or as an important feature of some broader activity—that is intended to serve identifiable learning clienteles and learning objectives.’
According to Grand Staff (1973) ‘non-formal education is intimately connected with the realization of the economic growth approach to development’. He stated that ‘due to the flexibility and responsiveness of non-formal education, it is possible to go into the situation in which education is to be introduced’ (Sheth, 1993).

UNESCO (1997:41) defined non-formal education as “Any organized and sustained educational activities that do not correspond exactly to the definition of formal education” (UNESCO, 1997:41).

The concepts of education are changing very fast, especially in globalized world. Let’s see in details the types of education.

4. Informal education

The truly lifelong process in which every individual acquires attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from daily experiences. It is through individuals own family, relatives, neighbours, market place, work place and media.

Informal education happens throughout our life. It consists of learning activities that are voluntary and self-directed. Due to motivation mainly by intrinsic interests, curiosity, exploration, manipulation, fantasy, task completion, and social interaction, one learns through informal ways. Informal learning occur in or out-of-school settings. It can be linear or non-linear and often is self-paced. It provides an experiential base and motivation for further activity and learning. The outcomes of informal learning experiences in science, mathematics, and technology include a sense of fun and wonder. It helps for a better understanding of concepts, topics and processes.

Informal education is unpredictable. It happens in the moment. In informal education, the person learns by responding to situations and through experiences. It does not have either any prescribed learning framework, nor organized learning events or packages. What is more important is that those who learn through informal education have hardly any control over the environment/situation. A considerable amount of education happens beyond the school walls, outside the academic books. There is a need to recognize it. Self-directed learning opportunities are ample. One can learn from musical events, art exhibitions, visits to places of environmental and historic interest (Rogers, 1986).

5. Formal Education

Formal education is a systematic, hierarchically structured, organized, and chronologically graded ‘education system’, running from primary school to the university. Usually at the age of 5 years, one enters in formal schools. It is institutional activity. It is subject-oriented and usually leads to certificates. After completion of one grade one can enter the higher grade. E.g. after completion of Std. I, one can take admission in Std. II. It has general academic studies as well as a variety of specialised technical and professional training programmes.

Formal education system is structured and administered in set of laws and norms. It has rigid curriculum with fixed objectives, content and methodology. It involves teachers, the students and the institution/infrastructure. Formal education is usually offered through schools, colleges and universities. Classroom attendance for students is compulsory. It involves intermediate and final assessments in order to advance students to the next learning stage. It confers degrees and diplomas.
pursuant to a quite strict set of regulations. Assessments are done usually at the end of academic year in schools and biyearly in colleges based on semester system. Assessment is done on general basis. Assessment follows mono-directional methodology which fails to stimulate students. Pattern of examination is fixed. Formal education system does not take into consideration the efficiency and efficacy of students. The subjects are presented in isolated blocks. In general, the objectives aimed at the personal growth of students are neglected.

According to UNESCO report ‘Alternative Approaches to School Education at Primary Level’, formal education mostly concentrates on ‘bookish’ knowledge. There is no place in the school programme for learning experiences that a child brings to school such as, tending the family cattle, participating in family or neighbourhood activities, acquiring skills relating to family vocations, etc. (Mistry, 1998). These observations mentioned in the report are still relevant even after two decades. The basic principles of learning are not given much importance while planning curriculum and teaching-learning methods. In this system, teachers are ‘givers’ and learners are at ‘receiving end’. In other words, in this system, teachers pretend to teach; students pretend to learn; and, institutions pretend to be really catering to the interests of students and of the society. In short, formal education system is far away from the real needs of the students.

The setting-up of a formal education system does not consider the students’ standards, values, attitudes that are relevant to the education system. The subjects are presented in isolated blocks. In general the learning objectives of students are neglected. The basic principles of learning are overlooked in the planning of formal education. It will not be exaggerated to say that in the case of formal education mostly the teachers pretend to teach; students pretend to learn; and, institutions pretend to be really catering to the interests of students and society. Thus, generally, formal education remains aloof in catering the needs of the students and of community at large.

6. Non-formal education

Background
Way back in 1972, the UNESCO put forth the concept of ‘learning society’. To achieve this, education should reach to all age groups and all sections of society. For this out of school education becomes as important as formal education. It was realized that learning could not be confined to a particular place, time or age group. Thus the idea of non-formal education came up.

The term ‘Non-formal’ was first used in the early 1970s. The intension was to make people aware about other types of education. Though, since aegis, people were practicing non-formal education for teaching religious practices, learning crafts from older generation, agricultural tasks, learning language, cooking, etc., it did not become a parallel system to formal education. It was in late 1970’s educational activities organized outside the established formal system were recognized as non-formal education activities.

The concept of NFE has undergone changes over a period of time. Some people believe NFE as a complementary to the formal education, others think it is an alternative to the formal system. In other words, it is being conceived as an
organized activity outside the formal system. According to Professor Malcolm Adiseshiah, ‘the NFE is wide-ranging because it comprehends all learning outside of the formal system, has no parameters of time and space. It can be classified for preschool, un-schooled and under-schooled children in the age-group 1-15, and for youth and adults, or needing new additional skills in the age group 15-60’ (Singh, 1987). Based on learning content, NFE can be grouped under two heads namely activities where the major emphasis is on general education and where the mainly focuses on vocational skills.

Family and other local institutions play an important role in NFE. For instance, children/youth pick up vocational skills by helping in the work done by their families (e.g. Carpentry, pottery, etc.), women learn to manage household chores or upbringing of children, religious educations organised in temples and mosques, etc. Are examples of non-formal education. In all these literacy is not necessary. Mostly it is acquired through oral communication and actual participation. It is also worthy to note that the NFE system has a variety of types meant for different groups of individuals as per their needs and situations.

7. **Need for Non-formal Education**

Education plays a pivotal role in social reconstruction and development of a person. In today’s globalized world, where knowledge explosion is taking place continuously, linear expansion of non-formal education is both desirable and inevitable. There is a direct relationship between educational and economic expansion. It reflects in Gross Net Product (GNP) of a nation. Thus, education sector is expected to meet the growing requirements of a trained middle and high-level manpower for the sustained growth of economy. As the cost of formal education is increasing day by day, government is not willing to invest in it and thus promoting privatization. Also formal educational systems have adapted too slowly to the socio-economic changes around them. Thus there is need to have some parallel system which can fulfil the needs of people.

Millions of people in the world are still living in conditions of poverty, hunger, ill health and illiteracy. Their basic elementary needs are not fulfilled in spite of technological development. Increasing the gap between the ‘haves’ and ‘have not’s is resulting into uneven development. The main reason behind this is illiteracy. On one hand, percentage of literacy is increasing and on other hand absolute numbers of illiterates are increasing. To educate crores of illiterates irrespective of sex, age, skilled/unskilled, able-disabled, non-formal education system should be developed. In most of the developing countries, the enrolment of children in the school and their sustenance is not hundred percent. As a result school dropout rate of children is very high. Competency level of those students who complete the primary education is also questionable.

Many times it is not possible for a government to provide formal education for its population. Sometimes there are many individuals, who can’t attend the formal education due to their own situations/problems. In both the situation, only alternative left is non-formal education.

Non-formal education happens outside the formal education system. It is more flexible in all aspects such as age, place, time, curriculum and examination. It considers the needs and convenience of learners. It mobilizes local resources. It also enriches human and environmental potential. Thus it can be called as an alternative system for formal education system. Hence, it is more useful for school dropouts, working children/men/women, poor people who can’t afford formal school.
Non-Formal Education is student friendly system. It does not require student attendance, thus, decreasing the contacts between teacher and student. Most of the activities take place outside the structured institution. It has flexible curricula and flexible teaching methodology. This system is capable of adapting to the needs and interests of students, for which time is not a pre-established factor but is contingent upon the student’s work pace. It emphasizes to fulfil the needs of students. Non-formal education prepares students to deal with daily problems. Non-formal education is capable of adapting to the interests of students, as it is need based.

The current formal education system is inadequate to meet - effectively, efficiently - the needs of individuals and of the society. There is a need to fulfil demands of growing number of people.

The formal education system has limitations. It cannot reach all sections of a society as it is rigid and also expensive. In India, though primary education is free, only certain sections of the society can afford middle school and higher education. There are a large number of children belonging to deprived classes who remain away from formal school system due to poverty, migration, etc. Hence, there is a dire need to have NFE. It gives them second chance to get education. Government of India has implemented many schemes to enrol the out of school children. In formal education, there is very limited scope for learning. NFE meets certain demands of the market. If non-formal education is implemented carefully, education will reach all the individuals of all age groups.

8. Scope of Non-Formal Education in India

Formal education system exists in all countries. Non-formal education is just a complementary system to formal education. As stated earlier, NFE is need based, flexible, and cost effective. In addition to the Central and State Governments, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have played a major role in implementing the NFE programmes. Most of the time it is misunderstood that NFE is for school dropouts and poor and weaker sections of the society. But it is partially true. NFE gives second chance to those who have left the school in between. It also gives the chance to learn those who never had been to school (missed the chance). For example adult education for illiterates.

Looking at the very nature of NFE, one can say that it is an instrument for development- personal, economic as well as political. It helps in improving productivity, as it focuses on skill development.

9. To whom it serves? (Target group)

It is intended for all age-groups and sections of society-child, youth and adult; working and non-working men and women, the unemployed and leisured; illiterate, semi-literate, literate or educated; urban/rural or tribal people. In other words, all categories of people if and when they need, if and when they want- will be in a position to use non-formal opportunities for learning. Even those who are in formal education system or who have benefitted from it also need non-formal education for personal fulfilment, professional growth or deeper understanding at all the stages of life.

However, benefits from formal education system have been largely drawn by privileged section of society. Non-formal education is mostly attended by under-privileged people: the poor, landless, illiterate, women and tribal. This is necessary to bring the equitable society. Priority should be given to those who have been neglected for a long time. Non-formal education takes into account the interest, need and will of the learners.

Non-formal education serves to a variety of people which includes:
School drop outs;
Adult illiterates and semi literates;
Unemployed youth;
Differently able children/adults;
Workers from unorganized sector;
Poor marginalized people; and
Those who do not fit into the formal education system.

10. Characteristics of Non-Formal Education

Following are the distinguished characteristics of non-formal education which makes it different from formal and informal education:
- Non-formal education is highly participative, non-hierarchical and learning happens in spontaneous environment. Here, all participants are both teacher and learners.
- Non-formal Education is for all, irrespective of age, sex, class (poor, rich). Anybody who is willing to learn can join it.
- It is flexible in many aspects such as duration, time, curriculum, methodology of teaching and evaluation of outcome.
- No fixed criteria for admission.
- It is need based (demand based), learner centric.
- It is skill-based, job oriented.
- It is available on job and off job.
- It is affordable.

11. Objectives of non-formal education

According to UNESCO following are the objectives of Non-formal Education (Pandya & Maniar, 2014):
- To promote awareness through literacy education programmes and acceptance of learning as a means to individual and national development;
- To establish national infrastructural needs and provide for manpower requirements;
- To provide equal educational opportunities to all, and through them more equitable distribution of national income and employment avenues;
- To mobilize existing and potential local resources in the community;
- To facilitate transfer of appropriate technology to more need-based areas of activity

12. Difference between Formal and Non-Formal Education

Following table explains distinction between formal education and non-formal education.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Formal Education</th>
<th>Non-formal Education</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Admission/entry point</td>
<td>Entry requirements determined/pre decided</td>
<td>Clientele determine entry requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
<td>Requires a fix infrastructure with class rooms, laboratories, library, etc. Teaching takes place within four walls. Isolated from natural environment</td>
<td>Doesn’t require a fixed structure. Teaching can take anywhere, any time. Usually place/venue is as per the convenience of learners. E.g. chaupals, in workshops, within</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>compulsory attendance</td>
<td>Attendance optional</td>
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<td>-------------------</td>
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<td>---------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching methodology</td>
<td>Rigid teaching methodology</td>
<td>Mostly participatory methods</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Democratic way</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>self analysis and reflection on learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals and curriculum/syllabus/ Content</td>
<td>fixed goals</td>
<td>Flexible and diversified goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>fixed syllabus</td>
<td>No fixed syllabus</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>outsiders decide the</td>
<td>Involvement of learners in framing the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>goals and curriculum/syllabus</td>
<td>curriculum/syllabus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>syllabus may not be suitable for all learners</td>
<td>Learner centric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>input oriented</td>
<td>Focus on current issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Individualized/output oriented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>Learning may take place in classrooms</td>
<td>Surety of learning is there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students may get passing certificates by just copying or mugging up</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>focus on teaching rather than learning</td>
<td>focus on Learners’ learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach</td>
<td>Authoritative</td>
<td>Learners and teachers/instructors at par (friendly relationship)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>authority centred around teacher and head-master/Principal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learners at receiving end</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hierarchical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>external</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Period and time</td>
<td>specific and limited duration in the early life of an individual (upto 10-15 years)</td>
<td>continuous process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>expected to fulfil life-time needs</td>
<td>No fix timings for classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Long-term and general</td>
<td>Short-term and specific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment in terms of years</td>
<td>Time consuming (8-15 years)</td>
<td>Short duration, may be part-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>full time</td>
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13. **Forms of NFE**

Learning develops capacity of a person. As NFE is need based, the clientele who joins the NFE are ready or willing to learn new skills. It helps them to gain new knowledge. It increases their ability to function more effectively in changing society. NFE serves to a diverse group of clientele. Following are some of the most popular forms of NFE used in twenty first century:
Correspondence education: It is planned, organized and structured. Many universities in the World offer correspondence courses. They include a wide variety of courses including professional one. People from all age groups and economic-social classes enrol for Correspondence courses. Students who enrol for these courses get printed educational material. Quality of this material is debatable. Some of the universities also provide CDs as well. There is no face to face contact of students and teachers on a regular basis. Sometimes guidance lectures are organized which are optional for students to attend. Correspondence learning system allows students to proceed at their own pace. The student’s motivation is the basic factor for the program’s success.

Distance education: the concept of distance education is wider than that of correspondence education. Print as well as electronic devices are used in this system. Nowadays, a large number of universities are offering online courses which are through distance mode. The online learning may be synchronous or asynchronous. These courses are designed specifically for those who cannot attend the formal education system may be due to their job or work. In other words, it provides an opportunity to learners to learn even though they are separated by time and distance.

Students submit assignments online and also get feedback through same mode. The organization and administration of distance learning significantly differs from those of formal education. Thus, for instance, no students attend classes at the institution, except for occasional visitors. The curriculum and assessment strategies are not uniform in all universities who offer distance education courses.

Instructional Design for non-formal education

The very nature of NFE is flexible. Hence, it is not confined to any one single instructional design. It is open to innovations. While designing instruction, one has to keep in mind following factors:

- Curriculum should be need based and also reflect national priorities;
- Instructions should be dependent on type of the content;
- Teaching methodology should be dependent on local situations.

There are four types of instructional designs (Sandeep, Madhumati, 2000) used in NFE namely-

- Content centred approach;
- Problem focused approach;
- Conscientization approach; and
- Human development and creative planning approach.

Each one of this is explained in detail in following paragraphs.

Content Centred Approach: this approach is usually used in programmes where a specific knowledge is to be transferred to people. Initially a baseline survey of learners is conducted to know the minimum levels of competency. Experts find the knowledge, attitude and practices (KAP) used by people. Based on this, new information is given to people to fill the gap and achieve the desired competency level. e.g. programmes on contraceptives (family planning), low cost nutrition and modern agricultural practices.

Curriculum in this approach mainly focuses on KAP gap. Usually content is divided into small units/messages. Various methods such as discussion with the help of charts and posters, personal counselling, demonstrations, role play are used to deliver the message. For example, if one wants to give information on child spacing,
one can use personal counselling method. For information on low cost nutritious dishes, one can use demonstration method.

**Problem-focused Approach:** this method focuses on problem solving. It helps learner to solve their day to day problems. It helps learners to generate information to find out the root cause of the problem and its solution as well. For example alcoholism. One can find out the reason behind drinking habits, its effects and solution to overcome this habit.

**Conscientization Approach:** this is based on Paulo Freire’s philosophy. It deals with issues of power imbalance and the exploitation of the poor by vested interests. By using this method, poor can become aware about their situation; develop their power to fight for their rights collectively. Content and methods in this approach are designed in such a way that learners are promoted to think and analyse the issues critically. Based on the reflections, people take action. For example rights of the domestic servants.

**Human Development and Creative Planning Approach:** this approach focuses on developing learners’ creative and planning capacities. This will enable them to function more dynamically and effectively as decision-makers, planners and change agents. This approach encourages creativity, innovations which in turn will help to improve the quality of people.

**Perspectives of Non-Formal Education:** non-formal education has promising future in globalized world as continuous information explosion is taking place. Non-formal education is need based which helps for individual as well national development.

**Recommendations**

The existing formal education system needs radical transformation, if meaningful development of all is to be made. It should focus on development of skills. A multiple entry system should be developed along with considerable flexibility in the choice, content and duration of the courses (Sheth, 1993). The content of education should be relevant to the learners life and job market as well.

**14. Conclusion**

Education is essential for the development-personal as well as the nation. It brings transformation-from a state of powerlessness into a state of power achieved through knowledge. It helps to take decisions and actions to overcome the hurdles in development. Non-formal education can play a vital role in the much needed radical reform in education system, especially in India.